

HISTORY OF CLAPP LABORATORIES



One of buildings in complex, known as the Shore House.

Halfway between the 2 flagpoles on Washington St. is a small sign hanging near a group of houses and buildings that reads "William F. Clapp Laboratories, Inc., Battelle Memorial Institute."

This complex of buildings is a world famous marine biological laboratory that studies the problems connected with biological creatures in the sea.

It all began because 2 kinds of small marine borers, one related to the clam, the other to the lobster, destroy wood in the sea. *Teredo*, or the shipworm, is a mollusk related to the clam. It starts its attack on wood as a microscopic larva. As it grows, it changes its form and bores into the wood in such a fashion that it increases in size so that it is forever trapped in that piece of wood.

The *Teredo* maintains a connection with the salt water by means of 2 tiny siphons, not usually visible to the untrained human eye. Thus, immense amounts of destruction can be taking place without detection until the piling or pilings collapse.

The *Limnoria*, or gribble, is a crustacean related to the lobster, and it does its damage by eating the wood from the surface

inwards.

Back in 1921-22 more than \$25,000,000 damage was caused in San Francisco because of the voracity of the shipworm. A marine piling investigation was begun by the National Research Council to ascertain what potential damage might be caused in other coastal areas of the U.S. Specimens were collected in wood bait-samples and sent to Bill Clapp at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology for identification.

In 1933, when the marine borer situation became serious in New England, a committee was formed to investigate our coast. By this time Bill Clapp was so interested and involved with problems created by these borers he left university life and set up his own laboratory in the barn of the family property in Duxbury. Oldtimers will remember many of the unusual and interesting antics that took place during those early years.

For over 20 years, Bill Clapp pioneered research as to the causes and possible prevention of the breakdown of materials submerged in marine waters, particularly in respect to the shipworm, *Teredo* and the gribble, *Limnoria*. By the 1940s calls for



The main lab, once a barn, was one of the original buildings in the complex.

help from all over the country and other parts of the world were coming from the Navy, the railroads, and private industry. The laboratory was incorporated in 1947 as a non-profit laboratory in Massachusetts. A group of men from government and business, including admirals, vice presidents and scholars, who were tremendously interested in the work that was being done, as well as the welfare of the laboratory, served as directors and gave instinctively of their time and advice throughout the following years.

When Bill Clapp died in 1951, A. P. Richards, who had been

Clapp's assistant, became president and director of the laboratories. The research expanded to include effects of borers on preservatives, coatings metal and man-made materials. Government and industry worked together to support research that would help fight the battle against marine borers.

After Pete Richard's death in 1963, Mrs. A. P. Richards was acting-director of the laboratory until the laboratory became part of Battelle Memorial Institute's Columbus Laboratories.

Since then, it has gone through considerable expansion of facilities, of staff, and with the scope of the work.



Hurricane Carol upended tree in front of King Caesar House.